

Media Advisory

January 6, 1998

Río Puerco Management Committee
New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department

ALBUQUERQUE — On Monday, January 11, the Río Puerco Management Committee (established under Public Law 104-333) and the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department will sign a **precedent-setting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to return the Río Puerco to its original streambed through a highway improvement project**. Over two miles of the Río Puerco were channelized in the late 1960s to accommodate the construction of New Mexico State Highway 44. The channel has become a primary contributor of erosion and sediment in the river's mainstem.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Deputy Director Nina Hatfield, New Mexico Deputy Secretary of Transportation Adolfo Lucero, New Mexico Secretary of Environment Peter Maggiore and BLM State Director Michelle Chávez — along with Senator Bingaman's Senator Domenici's, Congressman Udall's and Congresswoman Wilson's representatives — are expected to attend the MOU signing ceremony.

WHO: The Río Puerco Management Committee (established under Public Law 104-333) and the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department

WHAT: Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony to return the Río Puerco to its original streambed through a highway improvement project.

WHEN: Monday, January 11, 1999

WHERE: New Mexico State Highway & Transportation Department
District 3 Office
7500 I-25 East Frontage Road
Albuquerque, NM 87109

WHY: See background information attached

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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**RÍO PUERCO MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND
NEW MEXICO STATE HIGHWAY & TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING SIGNING CEREMONY**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Date:

Monday, January 11, 1999

Start time:

3:00 p.m.

Location:

New Mexico State Highway & Transportation Department
District 3 Office
7500 I-25 East Frontage Road
Albuquerque, NM 87109

Event Description:

The Río Puerco Management Committee (established under PL 104-333) and the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department will sign a precedent-setting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to return the Río Puerco to its original streambed through a highway improvement project on New Mexico State Highway 44. In the late 1960s, 2.2 miles of the Río Puerco were channelized to accommodate the construction of then Highway 44. The channel has become a primary contributor of erosion and sediment in the river's mainstem.

This is an innovative and unique approach to restoring watershed health. To our knowledge, there are only one or two other instances in the U.S. where a channelized river has been reintroduced into its original meander.

Through the MOU, the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department will construct two new bridges on State Highway 44. The Río Puerco Management Committee (RPMC), through its broad-based membership, will conduct the necessary feasibility, environmental and engineering analyses, and assume responsibility for physically returning the Río Puerco to its original meander.

The RPMC was established under the Omnibus Parks and Public Land Management Act of 1996. Functioning under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Committee comprises a broad cross-section of federal, tribal, state and county agencies, private landowners, environmental and conservation interest groups and interested members of the public. The members of the RPMC have been working collaboratively for two years to develop processes and practices to restore the Río Puerco Watershed.

The Río Puerco Watershed

The Río Puerco drainage basin originates in the Sierra Nacimiento north of Cuba, New Mexico, and comprises nearly 4.5 million acres, merging with the Río Grande at Bernardo, NM. While the Río Puerco contributes less than 10% of the water, it is the primary source of sedimentation in the upper Río Grande, contributing over 60% of the silt entering Elephant Butte Reservoir 65 miles downstream of its confluence with the Río Grande.

The Río Puerco Management Committee:

On November 12, 1996, the President signed into law the Río Puerco Watershed Act as part of the 1996 Omnibus Parks and Public Land Management Act. A bipartisan initiative fully supported by all of New Mexico's Congressional delegation, the Act represented a vote of confidence for doing business a new way: it endorsed a broad-based, collaborative approach to watershed restoration and management.

The Act directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Río Puerco Management Committee (RPMC), a partnership consensus group charged with developing best management practices to reduce watershed erosion, increase native vegetation, and improve riparian habitat while supporting the rural, agrarian characteristics of the drainage basin. Administered by the BLM, the RPMC has developed goals for watershed restoration, on-the-ground projects, and a unique collaborative process which involves a broad-based, watershed-wide stewardship commitment.

From the beginning, the RPMC has aimed to include a wide variety of interests and expertise. At present, the Committee includes cooperating partners from 36 entities, including:

Federal

Army Corps of Engineers
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Reclamation
Environmental Protection Agency
Fish and Wildlife Service
Forest Service
Geological Survey
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Tribal

Jicarilla Apache Tribe
Pueblo of Acoma
Pueblo of Isleta
Pueblo of Jemez
Pueblo of Laguna
Navajo Nation

State of New Mexico

Acequia Commission
Bureau of Mines
Department of Game and Fish
Environment Department
NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
State Engineer
State Highway & Transportation Department
Cuba Soil & Water Conservation District
Ciudad Soil & Water Conservation District
Lava Soil & Water Conservation District
Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District
Sandoval County Commission

Private

Albuquerque Wildlife Federation
Cabazon Water Pipeline Association
Center for Holistic Management
Quivira Coalition
Sierra Club, Río Grande Chapter
Society for Range Management
Río Puerco Watershed Committee
Private landowners
Public at large

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